

GROWING *Together*

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ENCOUNTERING THE HUMAN FACE OF GOD

Brian, a 40-year-old investment consultant, has attended Sunday morning worship services faithfully for 20 years. Slipping out quietly after the service, Brian does not stay to meet others. He is not active in any small group and has never been a part of a committee or ministry activity. Brian is a successful businessperson, has close family ties and good friends but in church is silent.

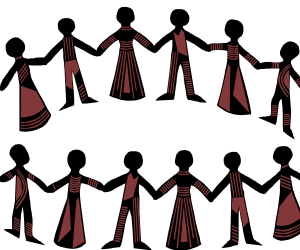
Brian is gay. Gay and lesbian people live with uncertainty in the church. They are fearful of harsh judgements against them.

Many Christians are uncertain and fearful, confused about how to respond to gays and lesbians and about remaining faithful to Scripture and the Church. For two thousand years faithful followers of Christ have been committed to standing up for the powerless. Yet when faced with standing against the mistreatment of homosexual people Christians have often remained silent.

Gay men are beaten, even murdered by those who are afraid of them and hate them. Schools are not safe places for teens struggling with their sexuality. When gay and lesbians “come out” in their places of work many lose their jobs.

In school, at work, and at home, Christians remain silent.

Deep within that silence, Christians stand divided over differing interpretations of what the Bible says. For example, the story of the men of Sodom who came to Lot’s house demanding to have access to Lot’s two male visitors has been interpreted in very different ways (Genesis 19:1-9). Some say that this is a story about lust; others say it is a story about hospitality.



If we dare to look deeply upon Christ, we discover the face of our neighbour returning our gaze. If we are unwilling to look upon the face of our neighbour, we run the risk of missing the very face of God.

Scripture isn’t the only point of disagreement. Christians hold differing opinions about what is “natural” and “normal” in our world. Some believe that nature is the measuring stick by which we can determine God’s purpose for creation. However, there are forces in nature and the animal kingdom that do not necessarily clarify how human beings should live. For example, mothers of some species eat their young. And counter to what many believe, biologists have shown that homosexuality is common in nature.

We find it difficult to integrate our sexuality with our Christian faith. It is not surprising then that homosexuality is difficult to talk about.

What makes us uneasy? Are we afraid that Brian will molest our children, convert our young people and destroy the “natural” bond between a man and a woman? Does homosexuality offend God? If these are our concerns we must investigate these kinds of claims. Some fears are not based on fact; others need to be carefully explored and discerned within the body of Christ. Facing our fear and educating our congregations is urgent business.

Christians face a serious and immediate challenge. Are we willing to extend hospitality to homosexual people who wish to participate in Christian worship? Are we able to live with each other when we do not agree on how to respond to gay and lesbian Christians in our midst?

Since our human understanding is never complete, our interpretations and opinions can never be complete either.

“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.” 1 Corinthians 13:12

GROWING TOGETHER is a series of five monthly Sunday bulletin inserts for the ecumenical education of Christ’s faithful.

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